Introduction

The High Cost Of Endurance

Kenji Kawana

A Navajo girl plays "America's game" wearing traditional gear.

They are the original "at risk" Americans.

Yet in the school-reform movement, Native Americans have been all but invisible. They are an asterisk to the roster of statistics on the educationally disadvantaged—an anonymous "other" in the phrase "blacks, Hispanics, and other minorities."

Demography plays a role in this lack of visibility. Indians make up a little over one-half of 1 percent of the U.S. population.

But history—and the stark contours of Native America's socioeconomic landscape—provide compelling reasons to look beyond the asterisk.

Unlike other minority groups, American Indians have been specifically promised—through treaties and other federal measures—the nation's help in educating their young. Politically, they are unique—an indigenous "nation within a nation" that forfeited land for the promise of peace.

But despite more than a century of interactions with the federal government over the exact nature of that special status, the needs of Native Americans remain woefully under-examined.

Reports on current youth issues, such as the National Research Council's study of adolescent sexuality, *Risking the Future*, make note of a glaring "lack of complete and consistent information" on American Indians.

No 'True Research'

Not even the precise size and characteristics of the community are available in unequivocal detail. The 1990 U.S. Census will be the first to promise "100 percent counts" for some 200 Indian tribes. Previous censuses have contained only sample information—and have relied on self-identification to establish whether respondents were in fact Indians.

School-related data have been even scarcer. Only in 1968 did the federal government begin providing nationwide enrollment figures for Indians in public schools, even though the majority of Indian students were attending public schools long before then.

"Nobody is doing any true research," laments Rachel Misra, an administrator with the Navajo Nation's education division. "They start with a hypothesis and then go about proving it."

Says the University of Oklahoma's assistant vice-provost, John Steffens: "There is no nationally relevant data, only project-by-project data, and that's weak."

Nevertheless, the collective portrait of Native American children that emerges from the statistics that do exist is one of extreme risk—a risk that in many cases exceeds that for blacks and Hispanics, the two population groups most heavily targeted thus far in school-reform efforts. For example:

● *Native Americans have the highest dropout rates of any racial or ethnic group in the United States.* The U.S. Education Department's longitudinal study of 1980 high-school sophomores put the figure at 29 percent. Other studies, which include students from lower grades and those attending federal Indian schools, go as high as 50 percent.

What is more, they show that Native American children begin dropping out of school much earlier than other groups, often in the elementary years.

● *The teenage suicide rate among Indians is the highest of any group.* Clusters of teen suicides are hitting even small reservations, with six youths on the Warm Springs Reservation in central Oregon (population 2,800) killing themselves during a two-month period last year. Nine young people on Wyoming's Wind River Reservation took their own lives during a five-week period in the fall of 1985, and in the Alaskan village of Alakanuk, whose total population is 550, eight Yikik Eskimo teenagers committed suicide in 1986.

● *In school, Native Americans stand a greater likelihood than other groups of being labeled handicapped or learning-disabled.* According to data from the federal longitudinal study, 11 percent of Indian sophomores in public and private high schools were enrolled in special-education programs; another 36 percent were classified as having some form of handicap, and only 53 percent were termed "not handicapped" in any way. Among blacks and Hispanics, those in special programs represented 9 and 7 percent, respectively, and the proportion classified as not handicapped in any way was 66 percent.

● *Rates of poverty and unemployment in the Native American community are among the highest in the nation.* According to the 1980 census, the median family income for Indians was $13,600—more than $6,000 less than the median income for all families. The poverty rate for individuals—28 percent—was more than double the national rate of 12 percent, and the unemployment rate was also double the national average.

The conditions on reservations, where one-quarter of the Indian population resides, are far worse.

According to a 1986 report by the U.S. Interior Department, male unemployment on the reservations is 58 percent and the poverty rate approaches 50 percent. Some reservations report unemployment rates of 90 percent. And 14 percent of those living on reservations survive on incomes of less than $2,500.

● *Indian children have a greater than average likelihood of being without the educational advantages of living in a two-parent family, having parents who are themselves educated, or coming from environments in which formal education is highly valued.*

Almost one Native American family in four is headed by a woman, according to the 1980 census count. Figures from the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs indicate that single-parent families make up almost 40 percent of Indian households. And though the proportion of black children living with only one parent is higher, no other racial or ethnic group has as many children living with neither parent.

In public and private high schools, the proportion of Indian students living in families where the best-educated adult has less than a high-school diploma is slightly more than 1 in 10, according to the Education De-

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> *"The story of the Indian . . . is a record of endurance, of survival, of adaptation and creativity in the face of overwhelming obstacles."*
>
> —Richard M. Nixon

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partment's study. The 1980 census figures indicate that, among reservation Indians age 25 and older, 27 percent have less than an 8th-grade education.

In addition, a 1988 report by the Bureau of Indian Affairs indicates that many Native American parents do not have "as high expectations as other minorities for the educational achievements of their children," in part because of their own negative school experiences.

According to the report, only about half of the Indian parents surveyed thought their high-school child should go to college. By contrast, about 70 percent of black parents wanted their children to attend college.

● *The health conditions of Indian people are among the poorest of any population in the United States.* The infant-mortality rate is 11 percent above the national average, the rate for diabetes is five times higher than that of the population at large, and the incidence of tuberculosis is eight times higher.

Adding to these problems—and, some health officials say, to Native American children's learning difficulties—are widespread nutritional deficiencies in poorer reservation communities.

In addition, Indian leaders and health experts have long identified substance abuse—particularly alcoholism—as a pervasive and entrenched problem on many reservations, affecting, by some estimates, the lives and functioning of more than 60 percent of the children.

Four of every 10 deaths among Indians are alcohol-related. And recent research has found that up to 25 percent of infants in some tribes are born mentally and physically impaired by fetal alcohol syndrome.

'Not Voluntary Participants'

Taken together, these factors present a picture of the outer extremes of what has come to be known as the "at risk" condition. But added to them are intercultural tensions that American Indians share with other minorities and a unique set of disadvantages they bear as members of a subjugated people.

Like Hispanics and other immigrant populations, Native Americans often enter school with a language handicap. Though many of the approximately 206 Indian languages are slowly dying out, others, such as Navajo and Cherokee, are often spoken in the home as the primary language.

In addition, notes the American University linguist William Leap, many Native American children speak a hybrid version of English that incorporates the native language—an evolved form of communication he calls an "Indian English" code.

"You find these kids floating between two nonstandard languages," explains Dick Littlebear, president of the Montana Association for Bilingual Education, "a population growing up without a linguistic home. They haven't had the basis to develop reasoning skills."

According to the University of California scholar John Ogbu, the Native American child also carries into the classroom social handicaps stemming from his history that can depress motivation in the same way that language deficiencies hamper skills development.

Along with blacks and Mexican-Americans, Indians fall into a category Mr. Ogbu defines as "nonimmigrant minorities"—those who did not join the mainstream culture by choice and who, because of the constant evidence they see of racial prejudice, may have internally rejected the notion that education can pay social or economic dividends.

For Indians, this condition may be more sharply defined than for other groups. "Unlike all other Americans who trace their origins at some point to immigration," says a 1988 B.I.A. report, "Indians and Alaska Natives, as indigenous Americans, were not, and some are not today, voluntary participants in the American way of life."

'Absolute Might of White Society'

In fact, the struggle to maintain their integrity as a separate people has been a mainstay of Indian life since Columbus first set foot on the New World, misnaming the original North American inhabitants, numbering 10 million by some estimates, in the process.

Until the latter half of the 19th century, the struggle was a quite literal one, as the warfare, disease, and dislocation that followed the arrival of white settlers took their toll in lives and land. By 1850, the Indian population in the United States had been reduced to 250,000. And by 1871, when the last treaties with the federal government were signed, Indians had ceded more than a billion acres of often-sacred Indian land in return for peace and certain social benefits.

Among the latter was education. As early as 1774, Indian tribes were asking for—and receiving guarantees of—educational help in return for their land and good will. But what they most often received in return, according to historians, was an inadequate mixture of paternalism and coercion.

"For the past century we have been intellectually overwhelmed by the absolute might of white society," says the lawyer and author Vine Deloria Jr., a Sioux, in *The Schooling of Native America*, published in 1978 by the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education.

Mr. Deloria, founder of the Institute for the Development of Indian Law in Washington and author of the popular study *Custer Died For Your Sins*, argues in the AACTE publication that even the definition of education, as promulgated by white America, should be questioned by Native Americans. It is based, he says, on a belief in "individual salvation" and ignores the strong kinship orientation of Indian peoples.

He writes: "Rather than learning about the benefits of Western capitalism in the educational process, one would do better to learn about the old Indian customs and traditions. Spend time meditating on the means by which such ideas can be transformed into political and economic reality in contemporary America. Recognize again the collective or group nature of social existence."

The thought is one that has motivated many Indian educators over the last two decades, an era in which, for the first time, federal policy has been characterized by real efforts toward self-determination in Indian education.

In a 1970 message to the Congress that outlined a program aimed at putting more control over Indian affairs into tribal hands, President Nixon said, "The story of the Indian in America is something more than the record of the white man's frequent aggression, broken agreements, intermittent remorse, and prolonged failure."

"It is a record also," he said, "of endurance, of survival, of adaptation and creativity in the face of overwhelming obstacles."

'Educate for Survival'

Today, with the Indian population growing at a rate that is twice that of the nation as a whole, that legacy of adaptation and endurance is being put to its severest test. And neither government nor the diverse Native American community seems certain how best to respond.

William Geier, a consultant who toured Indian country in the fall of 1986 as part of an informal field study for the Edwin Gould Foundation for Children, said in his report that "throughout this trip, I had the overwhelming and sinking feeling that I was witnessing a process of complaisant, almost voluntary, genocide."

"Native Americans are rapidly killing themselves off as a people," said Mr. Geier, whose report, intended for internal use only, set off a furor when it was leaked to Indian groups, "and no one on the outside is doing much more than screaming about the injustice of it all, wallowing in guilt, or

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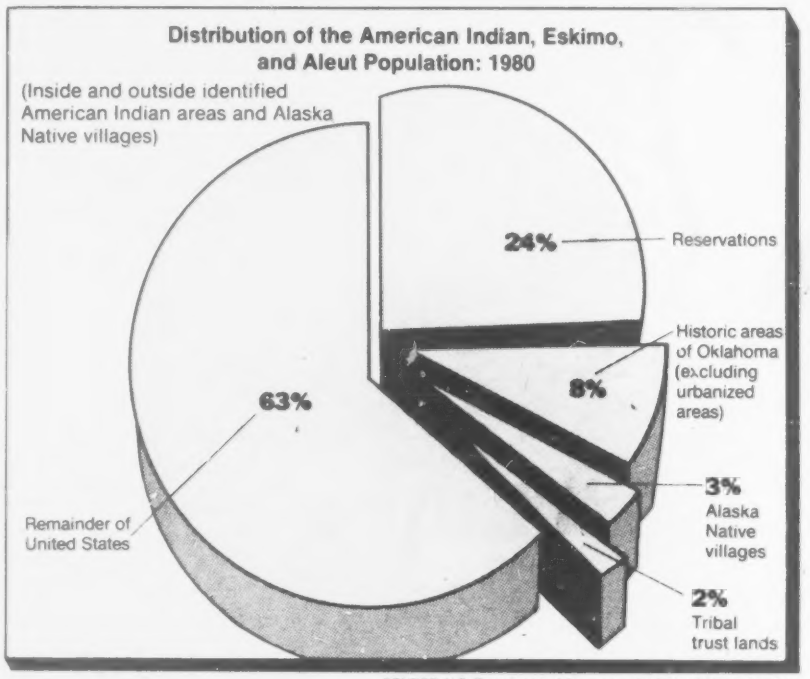
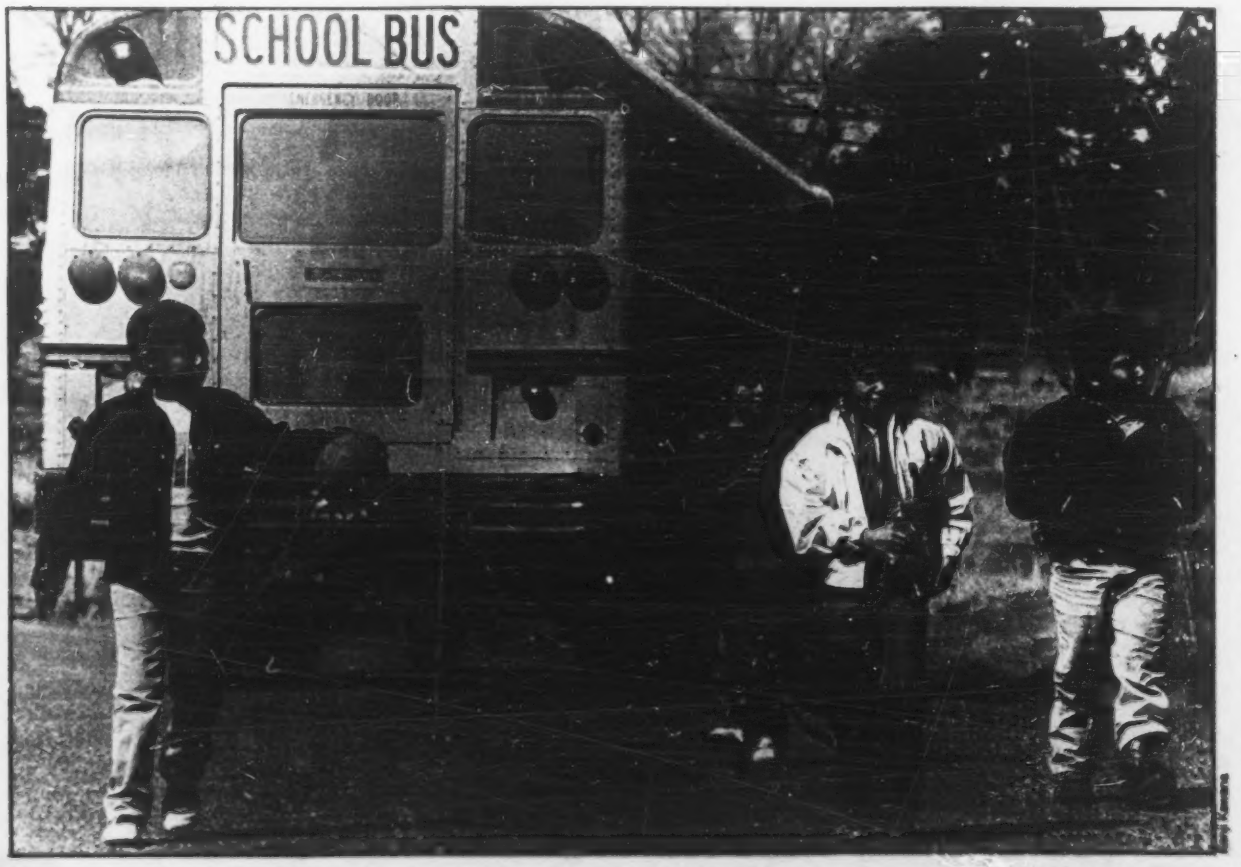
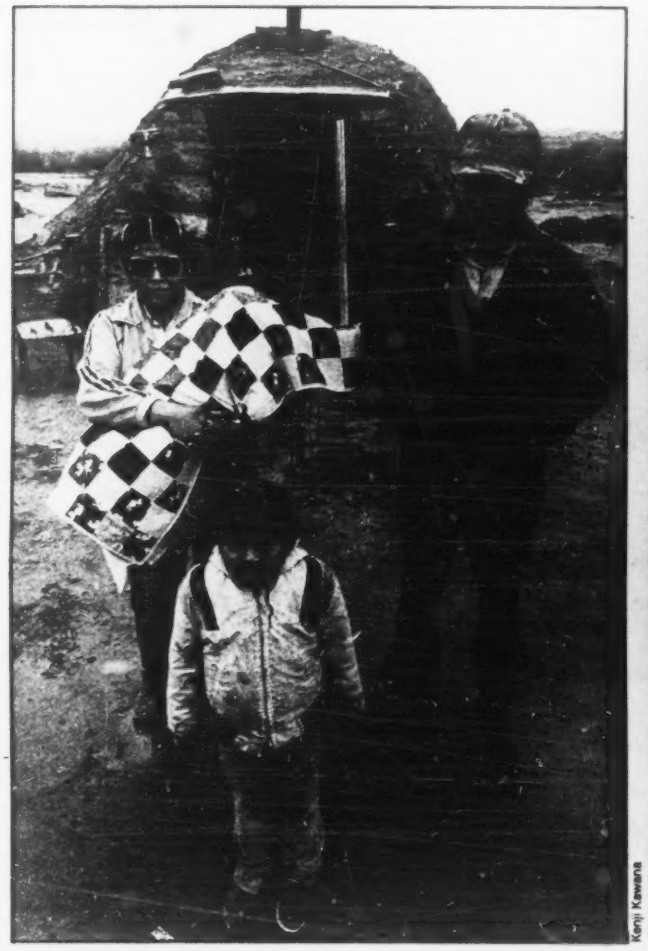


SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, BUREAU OF THE CENSUS



Elementary pupils at the Fort Defiance School on the Navajo Reservation in Arizona.



Kenji Kawana

Tom Casey/Oglala Lakota College

Tom Casey/Oglala Lakota College

From top left, a Window Rock Navajo family; Duane Janis, an Oglala Sioux playing for Little Wound High School, rebounds during 1983 South Dakota championship in Sioux Falls; an Oglala Sioux pupil.

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pointing fingers."

Though advocacy groups denounced some of Mr. Geier's characterizations of Indian parents as insensitive, few quarreled with his overall conclusion: "Indians must educate in the broadest sense of the word, educate for survival."

Determining how that can best be accomplished, however, has been hampered by the political complexities of the Indian's role in U.S. society—and by the diversity of opinion and of life situations within the Indian community.

"One of the fallacies that white people have of Indians," notes Mr. Littlebear, a member of the Northern Cheyenne tribe, "is that they think we're generic."

In fact, though the Native American population constitutes only a tiny fraction of the U.S. population, it encompasses some 206 languages, more than 500 tribes and native groups, and vast differences in custom, wealth, economic development, geographic isolation, and tribal governance.

This diversity has led to divided opinions on some key issues, such as the speed with which tribes should assume some of the responsibilities now undertaken by the federal government, and the balance that should be struck between short-term and long-term solutions to economic problems.

In 1987-88, the College Board and the American Indian Science and Engineering Society co-sponsored a series of seven "dialogues" in various parts of the country that brought together Indian leaders and others to attempt to reach a consensus on areas of need in Indian education. In a draft report from a dialogue held in Portland, Ore., Susan Ware, the project director, makes clear that a recognition of Indian diversity will be central to planning for change.

"One of the major problems of American Indians at present is the fact that they are seen as 'one people with one need,' " Ms. Ware writes. "It must be recognized that this is simply not true."

"There are measurable differences," she says, "between urban Indian educational needs and the educational needs of the reservations." And wide variations within these settings exist in the training and support given teachers, the involvement of parents and tribes in education, and the impact of economic and other social factors.

"All Indian people and all Indian educational needs are not the same," she asserts, "and cannot be dealt with in the same manner."

Indian Country's New 'Battleground'

There seems little chance, from a logistical standpoint, that today's 400,000 Indian schoolchildren will ever be dealt with in some uniform way. They attend schools of varying types—including federal, state-funded public, and private. And within each type of setting, the Indian influence over curriculum and governance may vary from little to great.

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Today, what is traditionally thought of as "Indian education"—the programs of the 181 schools funded by the Bureau of Indian Affairs—is actually only a small component of the whole. Less than 10 percent of Indian students nationally—about 38,000—attend B.I.A. schools. Approximately 11,000 of these students are enrolled in B.I.A. boarding schools, which were once a staple of the federal system.

Seventy of the B.I.A. schools are operated by tribes under contract with the federal government, so-called contract schools.

About 5 percent of Indian students attend private schools, usually those affiliated with religious groups having a history of involvement in Indian schooling.

More than 85 percent attend public schools, where they may receive special services of varying quality through federal programs that compensate states serving large numbers of Native Americans.

Though 43 percent of the public-school students are enrolled in schools located on or near reservations, equal numbers attend urban and inner-city schools. There, they are likely, educators say, to face the same kinds of pressures and problems faced by black and Hispanic students—with the additional burden of a sometimes fierce battle of cultures.

In Minneapolis, the persistent underachievement of the city's large population of Indian students led in 1987 to protests that resulted in the formation of a task force to study the idea of creating a separate school district for Native Americans. Said one board member of the controversy: "Public education has just blown it. We have put all kinds of money into programs . . . and done a simply miserable job."

Last year's report by the bureau, though nodding to recent gains, concluded that, whether they are enrolled in B.I.A. facilities or other systems, "far too many Indian children still leave school without having mastered the basic knowledge and skills that formal education is supposed to provide."

The report calls Indian education a "small battleground in the movement to improve U.S. education" but one that could yield insights into "the problems and the poor results of minority education throughout America."

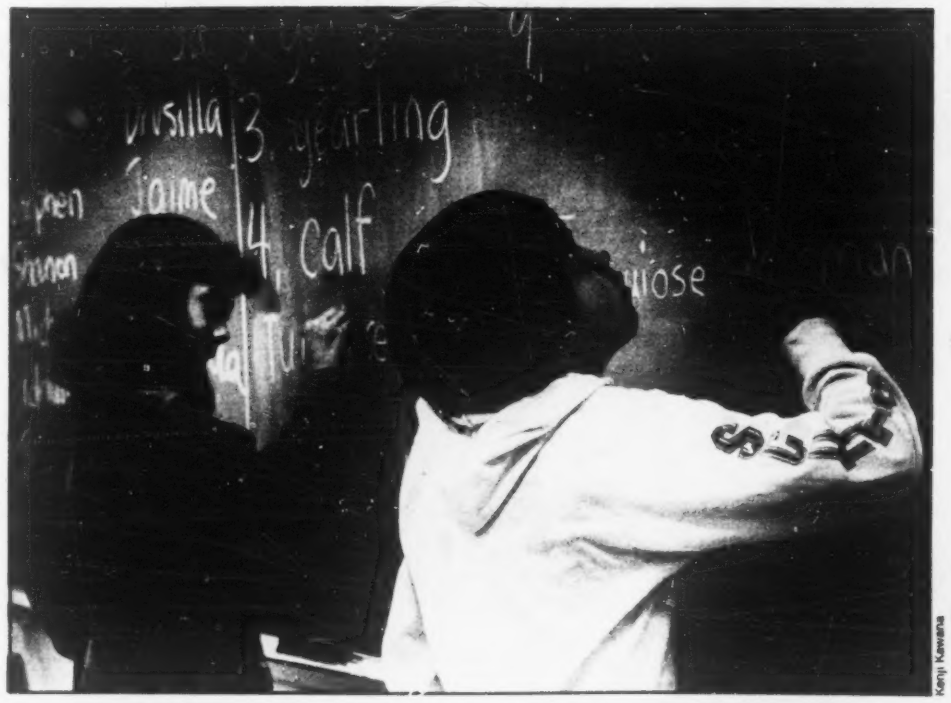
All the forces that unite Native Americans—their common respect for heritage, their strong "kinship orientation," their shared history of oppression—are being drawn on now, as leaders at all levels of government, including the tribal level, seek the means of winning the battle.

They do so amid much uncertainty. The federal bureaucracy is seemingly poised for a rearrangement of the way it fulfills its historic obligations. But fiscal constraints at both the state and national levels militate against the provision of increased services. And the whole of education is struggling to find a balance between the twin objectives of "excellence" and equity.

For Indian country, which is seeking in education solutions to devastating and long-term economic hardships, this may be a historic moment. —M. Sandra Reeves

The Politics of Control

From 'No Power' To Local Power?



Kenji Kawano

One educator describes many Native American pupils as "floating between two languages."

A tiny minority among minorities, American Indians have had a particularly hard time exerting any influence over the education of their children.

"We're such a small segment of America, we have no power," says Sally Hunter, an Ojibway Indian who teaches in the Minneapolis public schools. "We have to rely on the kindness of those in power."

Although the federal government's policy of "self-determination" for Native Americans requires that the Bureau of Indian Affairs give Indian communities considerable say in the education of youngsters in B.I.A. schools, only 10 percent of Indian children today attend such schools.

The vast majority are enrolled in the public-school system. This includes both the majority of Indian children who now live off of reservations, in cities and in small towns, and the large number who live on reservations but attend local public schools.

For the parents of these children, finding ways to help shape their education has proven an uphill battle.

The Mesquaki Tribe, for example, dictates the education policies of the K-6 Sac and Fox School, which is part of the B.I.A. system. But the tribe has little influence over the South Tama County, Iowa, public schools, where nearly three-fourths of Mesquaki children are enrolled and where they represent 12 percent of the student population.

Lorraine Davenport, a former member of the Mesquaki parent committee that monitors federal Indian programs, says public-school officials often ignore the suggestions of Mesquaki parents and have little notion of the problems facing Indian students.

No Mesquaki has ever been elected to the South Tama County school board and none is likely to be, according to the tribal chief, Donald Wanatee. This is largely because Mesquakis who live on tribal lands are still denied the right to vote in school-board elections.

Although the reservation, where about 75 percent of the tribe's members live, is within the geographical boundaries of the school district, it is not considered a part of the school system for voting purposes.

"The public-school system is archaic," Mr. Wanatee charges. "It's bogged down in a quagmire of racism. We're not going to get anything from it unless we go to court and fight for it."

Turning to the Courts

That view is shared increasingly by other Native Americans, says Jeanette Wolfley, a lawyer for the Native American Rights Fund in Boulder, Colo. More and more, she notes, Indians are turning to the courts to extract from public-school districts a modicum of control over their children's education.

Recent cases have involved such charges as discriminatory hiring of teachers, unfair treatment of Indian students, and violations of voting rights in local school-board elections.

In 1980, for example, the Potawatomi Tribe, which lives outside the small town of Crandon, Wisc., began complaining to the state's bureau of equal educational opportunity that Indian students were disproportionately represented in disciplinary actions by the public schools. The tribe also charged that school officials had refused to provide culturally relevant instruction or to eliminate textbooks that depicted Native Americans in denigrating stereotypes.

After conducting two separate investigations, the bureau found that the school district had refused to provide programs geared toward Indian students' cultural needs, because such courses were considered "contrary to the concept of equality."

It also found that only four Native Americans had graduated from Crandon High School between 1970 and 1980, even though Potawatomi youngsters represented 7 percent of the district's 1,000 students.

In 1986, the Potawatomis filed suit against the school district and the state of Wisconsin, after concluding that their complaints and the two state investigations had failed to result in a solution.

An out-of-court settlement resulted in several reforms, including the creation of a tribal-education committee to review school textbooks, the introduction of cultural-sensitivity training for teachers, and an exploration of the need for bilingual instruction.

'Now They Want To Vote. What Next?'

Another 1986 lawsuit, in Big Horn County, Mont., centered on a voting system that Indians alleged disenfranchised them from public-school governance.

In *Windy Boy* v. *Big Horn County*, U.S. District Judge Edward Rafeedie ruled that Crow and Northern Cheyenne Indians had been denied access to schools and local government because of a discriminatory at-large voting system—a pattern civil-rights activists charge is common in localities where Indians reside.

Big Horn County is larger than the state of Connecticut, with a population that is 52 percent white and 46 percent Indian. Most whites live in the county seat of Hardin, while most Crows and Northern Cheyennes live on two reservations that constitute nearly 90 percent of the county's land.

Despite the large percentage of Indians in the county, before 1987 only one had ever been elected to the Hardin school board, which supervises a district that encompasses a populous section of the Crow Reservation.

According to Janine Windy Boy, president of Little Big Horn College and chief plaintiff in the case, the Crow Tribe had actively pursued voter registration during the early 1980's, in an effort to gain positions on the school board and on the county board of commissioners.

But by 1984, the Indian community had concluded that no matter how many Native Americans voted, they would always be defeated by the white majority.

Although the at-large electoral system featured district representation, it allowed all county voters to elect the commissioner for each district. Winning candidates sometimes gained as few as 20 votes in their own district, but were carried to victory by thousands of votes coming from elsewhere in the county.

The suit charged that such procedures violated the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and testimony during the trial revealed a variety of discriminatory voting practices.

Dale Old Horn, a Crow educator and linguist trained at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, also testified that Indian pupils were almost automatically tracked into vocational courses in the county's schools.

Other witnesses said school officials had refused to meet with Indian parents, once resulting in the loss of federal funds earmarked for Indian students.

Laughlin McDonald, a lawyer who helped prepare the Indians' case, says he was "surprised and perhaps a little naïve at how overt the discrimination was."

Indians in Montana, he argues, "are at about the same point blacks were 20 to 30 years ago" in the South.

In compliance with Judge Rafeedie's ruling, Big Horn County was divided into voting districts. And in 1987, two Indians were elected to Hardin's six-member school board.

But despite the court victory, Ms. Windy Boy says she does not expect any real changes in the immediate future. "Resolving voter discrimination doesn't solve all your problems," she says, when attitudes toward Indians remain unaltered.

After the court decision, for example, one white resident of the county remarked, "Now they want to vote. What next?"

In Wisconsin, Eugene Shawno of the Potawatomi tribal-education committee predicts that "it may be 10 years before we see any benefits" from such legal victories.

"There's hard feelings from way back," he says.

Making Politics 'a Priority'

Others complain that even when Indian parents are given the chance to participate in their children's schooling, many are reluctant to do so, either by serving on committees or by taking charge of program planning.

Some Indian leaders also worry that the election of Indian school-board members has not necessarily benefited Indian students. Often, they suggest, successful candidates have been more interested in personal advancement than in educational issues.

Gerald Wilkinson, who died recently after serving as director of the National Indian

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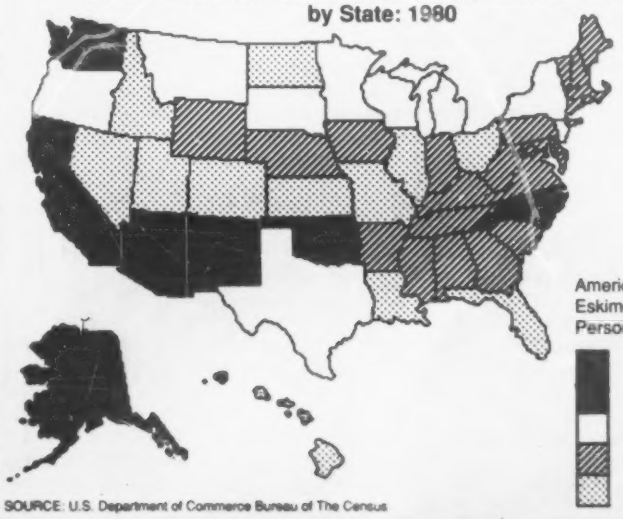
Number of American Indians, Eskimo, and Aleut Persons by State: 1980



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce Bureau of The Census

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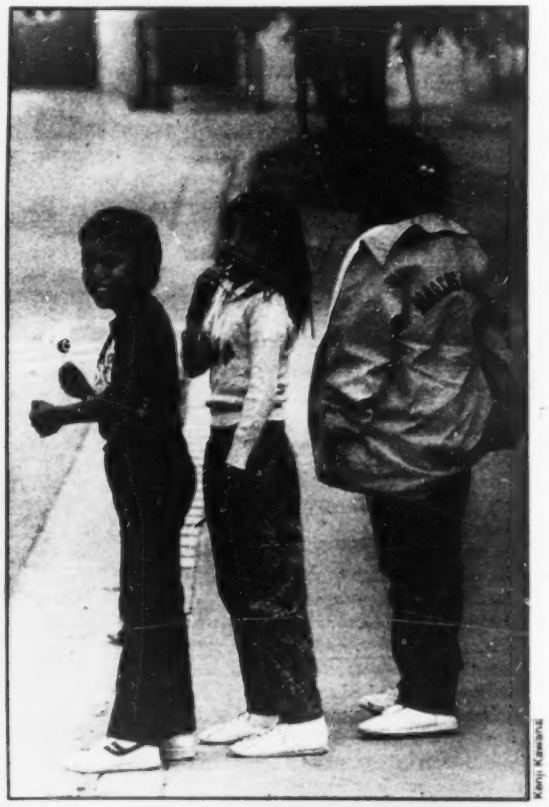

Kenji Kawana

Phoenix Newspapers, Inc.

Kenji Kawana

Navajo children of the Arizona reservation. "Many of our kids are ashamed of themselves," says Judy Davis, an educational consultant on the reservation. "They don't know who they are or where they come from. A lot of them are so ashamed they won't even say their Indian names in public."

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Youth Council, last year cited political inexperience as one reason that Indian communities frequently failed to elect effective school-board members. "With their history of suppression, being involved in the political process hasn't exactly been a top priority," he said. "But more and more, Indians are seeing how these boards are impacting on their lives. As they get more experience, they'll be able to discern who's really on their side."

A Zuni Success Story

In the rare instances in which Native Americans have been able to gain control over their public schools, the results have been promising.

In 1979, the Zuni Tribe in New Mexico concluded a decade-long study that found more than 40 percent of school-age Zuni children were not enrolled in school. That same year, Zuni high-school graduates recorded average scores just above the 8th-grade level on the state's comprehensive test of basic skills.

Ten years later, Superintendent Hayes Lewis of the Zuni Public Schools proudly cites an annual dropout rate of only 3 percent and a 34 percent college-attendance rate among last year's high-school graduates.

He attributes the turnaround to the tribe's decision to break away from a large public-school district and establish its own reservationwide district.

Prior to that separation, no Zuni had ever served on the school board of Gallup-McKinley County. Today, the reservation's education policies are set by a local all-Zuni board.

Unfortunately, most observers concede, success stories like the Zuni's remain anomalies. Establishing public schools that are Indian-controlled, such as the Zuni Reservation's, requires a unique demographic situation. The Zunis had a large enough population to justify creating their own school district, yet they were a small enough segment of the Gallup-McKinley County district that their efforts to break away did not threaten the larger school system's economic viability.

'Time To Try Something Different'

Many Native Americans are keeping a close eye on a controversial proposal to establish a separate, all-Indian public-school district in Minneapolis.

The proposal, developed by a group of Indian leaders and area educators, would create a smaller district within the urban area that would offer a concentration of Native American programs and teachers and be governed by an Indian school board.

The proposal responded to the concerns of many Native Americans in urban areas that their children do not have access to culturally relevant programs or instruction and are discriminated against within the larger school system.

In a 1982-84 study, for example, the Urban Coalition of Minneapolis found that Indian students were suspended at nearly three times the rate of white students. At the same time, a statewide task force on Indian education found that one in eight Indian children was assigned to special education, compared with one in 20 whites.

Rosemary Christensen, director of Indian programs for the Minneapolis public schools, contends that radical steps are needed because of the "total failure of white man's education to meet Indian students' needs."

"The public-school system is an inert beast," she says. "It's full of institutional racism, and it can't move from its own inertia. We've pumped $4 million in federal money into that beast, and we've got little to show for it. It's time to try something different."

If adopted, the Minneapolis proposal could dramatically alter the course of Indian education, expanding the concept of all-Indian schools beyond the boundaries of reservations and into cities, where more than one-third of American Indians live.

But the idea is sure to be controversial.

Many city and state officials argue that creating separate public-school systems for Indians runs counter to desegregation laws. And they question the ability of separate schools to provide an equal education.

Others contend that once Native Americans leave the reservation, they forfeit their rights as tribal members to control general-education policies.

For now, if Indian parents wish to participate in their children's education, most must continue to rely on federal requirements that schools create parent committees to oversee federally funded programs, such as Title IV.

A 1983 evaluation of the Title IV program by the U.S. Education Department found that parents and staff members who participate in such programs are "often the only Indian presence officially associated with the school system." But critics also allege that the role played by parent committees is often meaningless, serving as little more than a "rubber stamp" for existing school policies.

Making Do in B.I.A. System

Even within the B.I.A. system—where Indian communities theoretically can exert substantial control over their children's education—Native Americans say the process of moving toward self-governance is fraught with problems. These include budgetary constraints, accusations that federal officials are slow to give up power, and infighting among tribal leaders.

Two years ago, for example, the Red Scaffold School on the Cheyenne River Reservation in South Dakota expanded from a K-9 to a K-12 institution to avoid sending area students to public or boarding high schools.

But despite the school's expanded student body and its greater transportation costs, the B.I.A. declined to increase its level of maintenance funding.

According to Brian Charging Cloud, a member of the Red Scaffold school board, the school operated for a full year in a jury-rigged facility. An old lunchroom was partitioned into high-school classrooms, and students took their meals at a nearby senior citizens' center.

In 1987, the Santa Fe (N.M.) Indian School was one of two B.I.A. schools recognized for educational excellence by the U.S. Education Department among 271 schools nationwide. But Assistant Superintendent James Moffitt complains that to excel, the contract school has had to rely heavily on private donations and other outside funding sources.

Moves To Control 'Discouraged'

Other tribal leaders complain that the bureau has discouraged their efforts to contract for the operation of reservation schools or has made it difficult to run those schools effectively.

Following a 1988 Congressional hearing, Representative Augustus F. Hawkins, chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee, charged that the agency had "discouraged" local Indian communities from operating schools and "caused needless program disruption and expense," in part because of bureaucratic red tape and intimidation.

The Cheyenne-Arapaho Tribe in Oklahoma, for instance, remains locked in a struggle for control of a school that the B.I.A. closed in 1984.

Bill Berlin, a former Cheyenne-Arapaho education director, says the tribe had taken over management of the school in 1979, hoping to create a learning environment that was culturally compatible with its students. Within two weeks, however, tribal factions secured a court order returning the school to B.I.A. operation. Five years later, the bureau closed the facility and transferred its students to local public schools.

Mr. Berlin contends that agency employees "fueled the fires" in the factional conflict by warning tribal members that B.I.A. jobs would be lost if the tribe took over the school. On most reservations, the bureau is a major source of employment.

Leaders in other tribes also describe situations in which community members, often those employed by the federal agency, were hesitant to become involved in school matters for fear of losing their jobs.

Tribal Politics Faulted

But the blame for such conflicts does not lie entirely with the federal government, Indian officials acknowledge. Within tribal communities themselves, they say, struggles are going on over who should control the schools—separate Indian school boards or local tribal governments.

The result is, some Indian parents worry, that tribal politicking will itself create obstacles to adequate schooling.

Many tribes, for example, have established departments of education to disseminate fed-

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eral funds to reservation schools, distribute postsecondary scholarships to tribal members, and operate Head Start programs.

Some have developed tribal codes of education, which outline policies for all schools on the reservation but are largely ignored. According to Roger Jourdain, chairman of the Red Lake Band of Chippewas in Minnesota, however, tribal governments would like to assert more authority over Indian children's education.

Addressing a Minnesota state task force on Indian education in 1987, Mr. Jourdain argued: "Rules and regulations of the state board of education that conflict with those promulgated by the tribal code must be waived or otherwise relaxed to ensure that tribal goals are met."

In particular, he proposed that tribes be granted greater power to hire and fire teachers in public schools on their reservations, as a way to ensure that tribally mandated curriculum policies are carried out.

'Local Control,' Not Tribal Control

The concern of educators and some Indian leaders about the emerging role of elected tribal governments stems from their relative novelty.

Tribal government, as it now exists on Indian reservations, was an innovation introduced with the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 that is not yet fully trusted.

Traditionally, many tribes were governed by consensus. No decisions were final until agreed upon by all members.

Indians' inexperience with European forms of government, and flaws within the political system imposed on reservations, have combined to produce frequent squabbles within tribes that are intensified by the tribal government's status in many instances as the community's principal employer.

Critics charge that tribal decisions are sometimes based on how many friends and family members can be given jobs, rather than on what is best for the tribe.

In this year's Senate investigative hearings, for example, Indian witnesses alleged that in exchange for bribes or other favors, tribe members fronted for phony "Indian-owned" companies that then performed shoddy contract construction work on reservations or bilked tribes of earnings from their natural resources.

But other witnesses and several committee investigators—who resigned over the issue—charged that the focus of the hearings should have remained on evidence of mismanagement by the Bureau of Indian Affairs rather than on the conduct of tribe members. They argued that instances of tribal corruption are to be expected in the movement toward local decisionmaking, and were overemphasized in the hearings.

In any case, educators suggest, the importance of local decisionmaking is not in how it enhances the powers of tribal leaders but in how it encourages communitywide empowerment.

"The concept of local control is just taking hold," says Anselm Davis, former superintendent of the Window Rock, Ariz., public schools. "People are beginning to realize their power and beginning to utilize it effectively."

While tribal governments should give direction to schools and help them set policies that will preserve the native language and culture, Mr. Davis cautions, "tribal control is not always local control. The focus should always be on local control."

'Someone Else To Blame'

But as the difficult transition to self-governance proceeds, many communities admit that they need more time to prepare themselves to take over school operations.

"I certainly want the B.I.A. out of our education and hope to accomplish that in the next four or five years," says Randy Plume of the Pine Ridge Reservation. But many residents on the reservation would prefer to maintain federal control indefinitely, he notes.

"A lot of people are afraid of what will happen without the B.I.A.," he says. "It's a typical adolescent attitude, just like wondering what will happen when mom and dad die. With the bureau running their schools, Indians have got someone else to blame: 'Damn bureau this' and 'Damn bureau that.' "

Eventually, he argues, when Indians are running the schools themselves, and have no external scapegoat, the schools are "bound to perform better."

"It may not be evident yet, but self-determination and local control are working," says Lorena Bahe, director of the Navajo Association of Tribally Contracted Schools.

"But those policies need continued support," she cautions. "It may be 15 or 20 years before we see their real results."

For States, a 'Low Priority'

State officials, generally reluctant to become too involved in the problems of Indian education, have often wound up instead in disputes over money with Native American communities.

Several states with large Indian populations have established Indian-education offices. But a 1983 survey conducted for the U.S. Education Department found that many states authorized little or no funding of their own for Indian programs and would terminate them if federal support ended.

In North Dakota, Dennis Blue recalls that in 1987, when he was state coordinator for Indian education, his office also had to administer bilingual and refugee programs, leaving little time to monitor Indian services.

Among state legislators surveyed by the Education Commission of the States in 1980, Indian education was generally a "low priority." Moreover, while many public-school administrators acknowledged that Indian students were not doing well, they insisted their needs were no different from those of other students, the E.C.S. researchers found.

One exception to the overall pattern of state neglect is Minnesota. In 1977, its lawmakers passed the American Indian Language and Culture Act. The law makes it possible for Indians lacking the requisite credentials to receive teaching certificates in bilingual and bicultural methods. It also provides for Indian classroom aides and programs to bring Indian languages and cultures into the public-school curriculum.

In addition, the state provides more than $3 million annually for Indian dropout-prevention efforts, cultural-enhancement programs, and postsecondary scholarships.

But even in Minnesota, state and federal expenditures are insufficient to meet the needs of Native American students, according to David Beaulieu, director of Indian education. In 1987, he said, nearly 500 of Minnesota's Indian high-school graduates who had been accepted by colleges were unable to attend because of a shortage of funds.

Losing Battle for Funding

In other states, government officials and Indian tribes have frequently found themselves in conflict over the allocation of federal impact-aid payments.

The Congress enacted the impact-aid program in the 1950's to alleviate the tax burden on public-school districts that include federal nontaxable lands, such as military installations and Indian reservations. For many public schools located on or near reservations, it is a crucial source of funding, sometimes accounting for nearly half of annual budgets.

In 1978, recognizing what it called the "special needs" of Indian students, the Congress also authorized a 25 percent add-on to impact-aid payments going to districts with substantial Indian populations. But many states simply folded the impact aid, including the add-on, into their equalization formulas—with the result that some districts with substantial Indian populations were classified as wealthier than others.

Last year's omnibus education measure, H.R. 5, prohibited states from including the add-on in equalization formulas but allowed them to continue folding in the rest of Indian students' impact aid. For financially pressed Indian educators, that provided some relief from political bickering but no solution to their schools' persistent funding problems.

"The state thinks we're getting too much money," says Patrick Graham, assistant superintendent of the Window Rock, Ariz., schools on the Navajo Reservation. "But they need to take into account the fact that expenses on the reservation are much higher."

Reservation facilities, which are usually more run down than average, require higher maintenance and utility costs, he explains. In addition, Indian schools must finance housing for teachers and large student-transportation costs, he says.

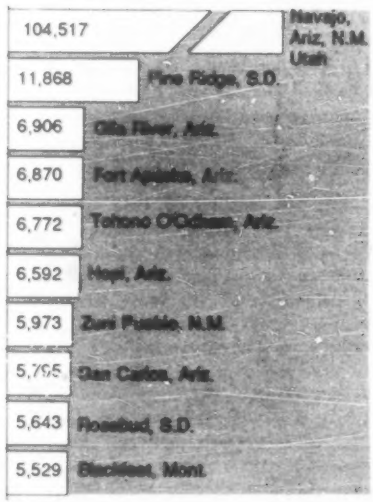
"A lot of these states are facing hard times themselves, and they're going to start looking more and more at ways to get hold of that federal money," says John Forkenbrock, executive director of the Association of Federally Impacted Schools. "We've got to educate them about why the Indian schools need to spend more."

But the combination of shrinking federal support and state reluctance to pick up the slack has left many educators in a pessimistic frame of mind. "I don't see much of a future for Indian education, haven't seen one since the early 1980's," says Harry Hendrickson, director of federal programs for the Gallup-McKinley County, N.M., public schools. "Quite frankly, I see a slow death for funding." —REPORTED BY DENNIS McDONALD

Federal Indian Education Programs

Program	FY 1986 Appropriation	Purpose
Impact Aid (Education Department)	$221.2 million	Alleviate local tax burden for public-school districts that include nontaxable reservation lands
Title IV (Education Department)	$62 million	Supplemental instruction for Indian students in public schools
Johnson-O'Malley (Bureau of Indian Affairs)	$22.1 million	Supplemental programs in public schools, including participation costs for Indian students and parents
B.I.A. Schools (Bureau of Indian Affairs)	$259.1 million	Operation, maintenance, and construction of B.I.A. schools
Miscellaneous	$55 million	Bilingual education, special education, and vocational education in public and B.I.A. schools

Ten Reservations with the Largest Number of American Indians: 1980



Overview of Indian Education

	Number	Percent
In B.I.A. Schools		
Operated by the B.I.A.	26,000	6.4
Operated by Indian Communities	12,000	2.9
In Public Schools		
On Reservations	70,000	17.2
Near Reservations*	105,000	25.7
Distant From Reservations	175,000	42.9
In Private and Parochial Schools	20,000	4.9
Total Indian Students Nationwide	**408,000**	**100.0**

* Both students living on and those living off reservations.

SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs, U.S. Education Department, U.S. Census Bureau, and ERIC/CRESS, a clearinghouse for rural-education statistics.

Julie Miller/Education Week

Secretary of Education Lauro F. Cavazos at Jemez Pueblo school in New Mexico.